

Anne Draffkorn Kilmer: Memorizing the Names of Things, From Oral to Written: Mesopotamian Musical Instruments. Kilmer's hypothesis that the classification methodology with which implements and instruments were written down in the great Sumerian and Akkadian lexical texts, especially with (HAR)-ra = *hubullu*, would be the consequence of mnemonics devised in Mesopotamian pre-literate times for the purpose of classification is highly disputable. The principle reason for this objection is teleological as the memorizing of items for the purpose of their classification under the form of lists could only have been the consequence of a post-literate concept. Indeed the concept of listing cannot conceivably exist without the ability to write: They made lists because they could write things down on a medium which lent itself to listing and that the categorisation of items of similar shape or materials of which they are made is axiomatically the consequence of their acrography rather than of their morphology. The acrography is the consequence of the determinative which in turn is the consequence of the nature of the object of the determinative, and in the absence of an alphabetic system, the acrographic semasiography was the only practical scribal device for listing anything. Of course one may argue that the determinative is to some extent the reflection of the morphology of the item but it will be found that in most cases it is only part of the item which inherits the determinative and that this is not sufficient to prove that a system of pre-literary mnemonics for the purpose of listing existed.

Kilmer goes even further in professing that the need Mesopotamians would have had of transcribing theoretical materials they had memorised in pre-literary times only happened ca.1900 B.C.E, without giving any reasons for it, is equally disputable. The fact that the oldest theoretical text (UET VI, 74) unearthed so far dates from about 1900 BC and that we have not yet found older ones is not evidence that they did not exist. Indeed out of over one million tablets excavated to this day, less than ten refer to music theory.

The presence of the long neck lute in the list should have been sufficient enough an indicator against her hypothesis in the light that its design implies the understanding of mathematical ratios that are necessary to appropriate frets or fret marks on the neck of the instrument and that this would not have been possible in the absence of a writing system. RD